

## COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

# Clone of aging computer a safe buy

Remember the IBM PC/AT? Although this machine, which uses the 80286 chip, has led the pack of business personal computers for some time, the advent of newer computers with faster 80386 chips seems to be nudging the AT into early retirement.

The news that IBM intends to phase out its PC/AT line in favor of its new PS/2 computers has further shaken the business world's confidence in ATs. This is so despite the fact that the new OS/2 operating system for the PS/2 line hasn't been released, and owners of computers using 80386 chips are still waiting for adequate software support.

So with a computer climate as volatile as today's stock market, why should businesses risk an AT or AT-clone purchase? Let's look at this question by examining one of the more remarkable AT clones on the market.

ATs are still powerful, reliable computers, able to meet most business needs. Furthermore, perhaps because of IBM's shift to its new line, AT compatibles have become more affordable. This reduction in cost can easily offset the risk of buying into a system that some fear will be outdated soon.

Now, imagine a computer that has more power and capabilities than the IBM AT, costs about 50 percent less, is backed by a well-established company with service centers nationwide and is certified to be PS/2 compatible.

Depending on your needs, such a computer could figure in nicely as a supplement to your more expensive computer equipment or as an entry-level system. AT clones such as this could handle the most powerful business programs that require fast calculation speed.

One of the machines I use is just

such a computer. It's called the A-Star II from Wells American of West Columbia, S.C. I've used my A-Star for more than six months without a hitch.

The manufacturer has wed true AT compatibility with the promise of future capability with IBM's new OS/2 operating system. Of course, no one can verify whether the A-Star will be fully compatible with an operating system that hasn't been released. It has run dozens of AT-intended programs that I've tested over the last few months. The company guarantees its AT clone will run anything that runs on an IBM PC/AT at the same speed. So when OS/2 is finally released, it will be at least as compatible as IBM's own AT.

Here are some additional great features:

- ✓ Wells American provides an unusual 31-day, money-back guarantee; and a free one-year parts and labor warranty.

- ✓ The computers can be serviced at more than 200 nationwide Gerca centers. I haven't had the

opportunity to test the service since I've never had a problem.

- ✓ The A-Star is well-designed. The base units come equipped with 512 kilobyte RAM — expandable to 1 megabyte — a 220-watt power supply with four device outputs, eight expansion slots, an 80286 CPU, a clock/calendar with a battery back-up and a choice of various keyboard styles.

- ✓ Wells American's most recent price sheet lists the A-Star base unit at \$995. The addition of a 1.2-MB disk drive and hard disks ranging from 21 MB to 80 MB raises the price to between \$1,795 and \$2,695. This is nearly 50 percent less than what you would pay to buy an IBM.

*The bottom line:* The A-Star computer appears to be a very safe buy.

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